

The Paul Laxalt Group

STATEMENT BY FORMER U.S. SENATOR PAUL LAXALT (R-NV)

SUBMITTED TO THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE

ON DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MONETARY POLICY

REGARDING LEGISLATION TO AWARD PRESIDENT

AND MRS. REAGAN THE CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

MARCH 15, 2000

I would like to thank Chairman Bachus and the other members of the Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy for holding this hearing to consider legislation designed to award the Congressional Gold Medal to President and Mrs. Reagan.

While I am hardly unbiased on matters pertaining to the Reagans, I think this honor is richly deserved. When Congressman Jim Gibbons of my homestate of Nevada first contacted me with the idea of presenting this prestigious award to the Reagans, I was wholeheartedly supportive.

I have known Ron and Nancy Reagan on a personal basis since the time Ron and I were elected Governors of our neighboring states in 1966. Nevada and California share a number of problems and, as a result, Governor Reagan and I worked cooperatively on a number of important issues, including the protection of majestic Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevada.

I was deeply impressed with how Governor Reagan, who had never held elective office previously, tackled the severe problems that were afflicting California in the mid-1960s. Whether it was campus unrest, a bloated bureaucracy, a partisan legislature or dealing with one of the world's largest economies, Governor Reagan tackled the problems courageously, forthrightly and aggressively.

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It was during this period that Nancy became a national - indeed, international - spokesperson for the Foster Grandparents Program. As the members of this subcommittee may know, in the Foster Grandparents Program elderly citizens volunteer their time to troubled and disadvantaged children and provide them with badly needed love and support. Nancy worked selflessly and tirelessly for this program because she believed so deeply in its goals.

Later, I had the honor of serving as Ronald Reagan's national chairman in his three campaigns for President. Although the first effort in 1976 was unsuccessful, it was probably the most exciting. Ron faced enormous obstacles, the most obvious of which was taking on a sitting Republican President. But he turned the conventional wisdom on its head and came within an eyelash of winning the Republican nomination. With Nancy constantly by his side, Ron showed the country the determination, style and character that would eventually catapult him to the White House and make him one of America's most revered political figures.

After Ron's election as President - and due to our friendship - I had the privilege of serving in a role that caused me to have one foot in the Senate and one foot in the White House. I served, in a sense, as the President's "eyes and ears" on Capitol Hill, while also serving as a link to the White House for my colleagues in the Congress.

Serving in this capacity allowed me to have a unique perspective on the Reagan Presidency. It's been almost a dozen years since President Reagan left office, which allows me to look back on his tenure in office without the emotions I carried during that historic period in our history.

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The other panelists will, I am certain, do a stellar job of recounting the President's many significant foreign and domestic accomplishments. Therefore, I will focus very briefly on the personal aspects of his legacy.

It is historically undeniable that President Reagan, as he had when he became Governor of California, inherited any number of seemingly intractable problems. The President knew what had to be done to overcome these difficulties - like most politicians at the time. But what made Ron Reagan so unique was the fact that he had the courage to do what was necessary to get the job done.

Whether it was wringing inflation and high interest rates from the economy, rebuilding our national defenses, reducing the enormous tax burden being carried by Americans at the time, the President addressed each problem frontally, even though he was met with a blizzard of criticism - even ridicule - at every turn.

A lesser person would have impulsively sought a compromise position lest he or she offend the political order in Washington. Not Ronald Reagan. He was able to achieve what he did because he always placed doing what was right ahead of doing what was politically expedient.

Even though I had known Ron for years, I found it amazing that he had never changed, even after he became President. He was as devoid of ego as any person I've ever met. And above all, he proved that decency and honesty could be enormous assets in public life, even in the rough and tumble world of national politics.

Throughout his eight successful White House years, Ron's indispensable partner was Nancy. I truly believe that a principal reason for President Reagan's enormous success as President was due in large part to the role Nancy played as First Lady, friend, confidant and spouse.

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She was also tremendous in her role as the national spokesperson for the Just Say No anti-drug campaign. Nancy recognized the harm caused by the drug problem in this country and set about to raise the nation's awareness of this national scourge. Like her husband on other issues, Nancy was ahead of her time in this crusade. I can only hope that future anti-drug efforts are as aggressive and uncompromising as Nancy's.

Like all Americans, I was deeply saddened by the news that Ron, like countless others, was afflicted by Alzheimer's. From a personal perspective, I regret that this great man, who had given so much of himself to improve the lives of people throughout the world, could not experience the joy of simply relaxing at his beloved ranch near Santa Barbara and reflecting peacefully on his remarkable career.

As one would imagine, this has also been an enormous strain on Nancy. She has steadfastly and courageously helped Ron cope with this terrible disease.

I want to commend Congressman Gibbons, Congresswoman Dunn and all of the other co-sponsors of the legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to President and Mrs. Reagan.

I cannot think of two more deserving individuals, and I think the Congress will bring honor on itself by passing this legislation.

Thank you.